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Quick Thoughts on the Strengths and Weaknesses
of the NIC and the Estimative System

Although I feel the system is in fairly good shape, overall, I will spend more space below in discussing continuing problems--since such exposition will be of greater help in seeking future improvements. My remarks pertain largely to the NIC as I know it--up to last fall.

Strengths

1. The basic estimative system is probably in as good a shape overall--and except for a few precincts, see below--than it has been since its founding in 1950.

2. Every Administration, Democratic and GOP, since that time has valued the product and the process, and has wished the basic enterprise to continue. It certainly should.

3. Over the years--and again with some exceptions--the endeavor has gained a fine reputation for objective, candid service.

4. The substantive batting average on estimative judgments has been pretty good, certainly better than the sometime view that stresses only those past examples of bum estimates.

5. The reorganizing of the estimative system into the NIC, in 1979-1980, has in the main been a positive step. Except as I indicate below, I would not recommend any major overhaul of the present system.

6. The greatest strength of the NIC, other than objectivity, is the greater contact this system provides between estimators and policymakers.

7. The system has been improved, since the NIC's founding, in various ways: greater contact with policymakers, larger quantitative output, more relevant output, more policy-connected "fast track" projects, greater contact between estimators and the DCI, more private NIC think papers for the DCI, etc.

8. The system of rotation and of drawing NIC personnel from a broad spectrum of backgrounds is a sound one. This is not a "CIA" endeavor, but a Community one. And, the variety and turnover provide for new blood, and for avoiding institutional analytic biases.

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Continuing Problems (in no particular order of priority)

1. The most serious danger in the NIO system is that it gives too much analytical/substantive authority to one NIO person. There have been cases where a strong, assertive NIO has been able to bull his way through and produce a National Intelligence Estimate that is not "National," but essentially the particular views of the NIO. A strong, senior, aggressive NIO can thus have his own way--with, in practice, little collegial input from others in the NIC, and little effective input or challenges from (usually junior) DDI experts. This danger much be attended to.

2. As an allied point, NIOs, especially the strong and assertive ones, have resisted collegial input, and most efforts to date to effect a systematic program of NIC/NIO panels have come to naught. This must be remedied: many of the NIOs are people with broad experience and keen insights; they can and should bring their wisdom and input to bear on many of their colleagues' projects.

3. There is insufficient review of estimates within the NIC, for both substance and presentation. In addition to collegial input, there must be much more loving care given to review by the NIC front office. This is difficult because the C/NIC and the VC/NIC are so caught up in so many endeavors, and deadlines are often so short. But extraordinary steps should be taken: either add more people to the front office, to relieve C/NIC-VC/NIC of some of their many present tasks; or assign a senior NIC officer to serve in the front office as the quality control person, full time, and the officer who assures that each product has had decent collegial and other review within the NIC.

4. Drafting of estimates has many short-comings, and demands major overhaul. The problem lies in the great proportion of outside drafters to whom NIOs have to turn. Many of their products are so-so or poor, and when this occurs it is very difficult for a beleaguered NIO, fighting many deadlines, to bring repair to bear. Especially so because these drfters do not belong to NIC, and the NI has no direct authority-discipline-standards it can directly bring to bear.

5. The best answer is to enlarge the NIC's AG in a major way, and strengthen the quality of its officers.

a. Create an AG of 25-30 officers who would then do the bulk of the drafting.

b. Get the DCI to give the C/NIC the authority (as obtained at the outset of the estimates process in 1950, Beedle Smith - Dr. William L. Langer) to pick and get any officer he wishes in the Intelligence Community for a tour in the AG drafting staff. These officers should come from many offices/agencies, as well as from outside the Intelligence Community. There was some such muscle from above (Bruce Clarke) when the AG was established in 1980, and certain of the CIA's very best analysts

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were anted up at that time for the AG [redacted]
[redacted]. But since Clarke's departure there has
been a singular lack both of muscle from above, and of willingness of DDI
barons to let their best people have tours in the AG.

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6. Much lasting repair work needs to be done in NIC-DDI relations.

a. The above-mentioned DDI practice. Allied: the refusal in many DDI offices to consider NIC products and service the elite endeavour they deserve. DDI managers often try to fob off second rate people and products on the NIC, and not reward their own people for having performed NIC duty, either as drafters or as rotatees here.

b. There needs to be much more DDI-NIC substantive contact and interchanges, especially at senior levels. Some takes place (NIOs, A/NIOs, AGers), but it is varied and haphazard. C/NIC, VC/NIC, NIOs, and top DDI officers need to create more systemized contact on substantive issues.

7. There have been too many instances in recent years of policy corruption of objective NIC judgments. Some of this has come directly from NSC staff, State, and Defense policymakers. Some from the DCI and DDCI. Some (and this is the worst of all) from NIC (and DDI) officers who in effect tailor their own analytic messages so as not to rile superiors who hold--or are suspected of holding--contrary positions. This is particularly marked, in varying degree, on issues concerning Iran, Central America, the USSR in the 3rd world, and overall Soviet policies. This weakness must be corrected. The NIC must tell it like it is, and let the chips fall where they may. Otherwise, the NIC loses its integrity and becomes part of a policy flak. This weakness has been particularly marked in the last six years, but there have been examples in previous years; the weakness is not the monopoly of the Casey/Reagan/GOP era.

8. The SRP could be made into a stronger service than it is, by bringing about closer SRP-NIC relations. The chief problem has been the SRP's style of insisting on getting into the act fairly late in the substantive process (whether CP/TORs or estimate drafts), and on confining their input to formal, written comments--paper mortar shells lobbed into the process. The SRP would be much more helpful if its members also got into the act, early, in face-to-face give and take with NIOs and NIO panels. Also needed is a clarification for the DCI of just which draft he's reading, and what the SRP-NIC inputs already have been. The chief hazard to date has been Amb. Bill Leonhart--who is an extremely wise, learned, experienced, and effective critic; but whose pride is insured so quickly and deeply whenever any efforts at change are suggested. Such change must come from the DCI.

9. Physical space is a real problem, especially in the 7B Warning, etc., area, and in 2E49 (SP/GPF). This may be solved when the new building opens. In any event, the NIC needs a lot more space, and its offices should be contiguous, not scattered.

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10. Secretaries/Registry. Our secretaries (How do you like that "our"?) are senior and able, but have to spend far too much of their time having to do bird jobs that could be done by GS-04/05 clerks. The Registry (7E47) at one time belonged wholly to the estimates office; now the NIC only has a small look-in. Situation could be improved greatly by assigning two clerks there wholly to mechanical NIC duties.

11. Minding the store duties by the C/NIC-VC/NIC front office. There is a need there--but will be remedied by the incoming of Fred Hutchinson.

12. Fuller use and recognition of the AG by the NIC front office and the NIOs. These people have much to offer, often having broader viewpoints than NIOs. They need to be systematically brought into more face-to-faces, etc., including collegial NIO panels.

13. NIO private think papers. A fine idea and should be continued. But very necessary are relaxed deadlines and care to have checked these papers with senior DDI (or other) outside officers, and with the NIC front office, before these are sent to the DCI. This review should not inhibit an NIO from offering his/her thoughts to the DCI, but will guard against front office NIC (and DDI) officers being blind-sided--and will offer them an opportunity to offer the DCI countering views should they wish.

14. A/NIOs and AGers should also be encouraged to do think pieces for the DCI. Though checked in advance by the NIOs, DDI (or others), and NIC front office.

15. Marketing of NIC products. Here is need and opportunity for considerable improvement. Too often we just sign off and assume that our products get consumed by the readers we would wish. This absolutely does not happen. DCI, DDCI, C/NIC, VC/NIC, and NIOs must do much more to propagandize, market, personalize--so that all our effort and wisdom does not die in the outbaskets of our desired readers' assistants or filters.

16. Also, must be more top NIC officer personal briefings of Key Judgments to President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Carlucci, JCS, etc. Also continue experimenting with new and better means of presenting NIC products: e.g., more maps, graphics, video presentations.

17. The USG needs a closer and more systematic tie between intelligence and consumers (especially White House). NIC should help advise the devising of such a system, and be prepared for example to place top rate NIC officers (one or two at a time) to such duty downtown, in conjunction with policy officers.

18. Much more, and more systematic contact on substantive issues between NIC officers and non-CIA officers of the Intelligence Community. This to include informal sessions [redacted] elsewhere.

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19. The new DCI will have an opportunity to urge SecDef to assign NFIB principals who have substantive competence and are not simply managers. NFIB is often a shallow sitting, with certain Principals buoyed up by cue cards.

20. Same for coordination meetings. The Cols, Lt Cols, and Majors should be chosen from on high (DCI - SecDef and down the chains) so that they can actually and effectively enrich coordination sessions, and not simply show the flag, etc.

21. C/NIC needs constantly to reinforce the demand for (1) sharply, clearly, and succinctly stated estimative products; and (2) clearly stated differences of view in the estimate. Above all, avoid coordinated mush. This means that C/NIC should put the real heat on any NIO who is too gentle, or gentlemanly. Need for NIO/Chairman balance between gentility and above-stated Hitlerian approaches.

22. NIC use of consultants is spotty. Use more, and at early stages of projects.

23. Hold regular pre-NFIB sessions - DCI, DDCI, DDI, C/NIC, and relevant NIOs - to go over the coming agenda, take care of last-moment problems, get everyone on board.

That's enough*
In haste,

Hal

*I'm sure I've neglected to include some more--

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